

The Georgetown Supreme Court Institute Moot Courtroom



The new Supreme Court Institute Moot Courtroom at Georgetown University Law Center is designed to evoke the interior of the courtroom used by the Supreme Court of the United States. It is not an exact replica, but it does provide advocates the opportunity for a “dress rehearsal” in an environment strongly resembling the actual Supreme Court chamber. One of the most unusual aspects of arguing before the highest Court is the intimate nature of the surroundings. Advocates stand in close proximity to the nine Justices and the room itself seems small in comparison to the impressive façade of the building. Here at Georgetown this moot courtroom recreates that atmosphere and is intended to enhance the benefits derived from practicing the oral argument in a moot court setting.

The first thing that one might notice upon entering the room is that the carpet pattern is nearly identical to that on the floor of the Court. The finish of wood and leather on the furniture is also strikingly similar. Raised Doric columns line the walls in a manner reminiscent of the Court’s imposing Ionic marble columns. Round light fixtures suggest the medallions high in the Court’s ceiling. Molded ellipses on the face of the bench are reminiscent of a rectangular pattern on the mahogany at the Court. Among the finishing touches, white and red lights will warn of, and then command, the end of each argument. Red curtains and a clock, which advocates will be cautioned not to look at (*See* GUIDE FOR COUNSEL, p. 5, Prepared by: Clerk of the Court Supreme Court of the United States), hang behind the nine person bench.



Passing by the gallery benches, it is obvious that there are fewer seats for audience members than in the Supreme Court because the room is smaller in scale. Importantly, the distance from the advocate’s lectern to the winged bench and the position of argument tables are the same as in the Court. The moot courtroom’s design was modified in other ways in order to accommodate technology and uses such as trial practice and student moot court competitions. Even so, the presence of a jury box does not seem to detract, but reminds one instead of the Justices’ guest seating area. Throughout the creative design and construction of this moot courtroom, Georgetown received wonderful cooperation from the U.S. Supreme Court staff. The result is a practice arena that beautifully calls to mind the surroundings where the Supreme Court Justices preside.

The Supreme Court Institute Moot Court Program is a nonpartisan, pro bono service that is provided to the legal community on a first-come, first-served basis. During the October 2003 Term counsel in over 63% of the cases argued before the Supreme Court participated in moots with the Institute. The moot courts are structured to last for two hours; the first half is dedicated to a formal argument by the advocate and the second half is open for discussion and feedback among the counsel and the “Justices.” Frequent practitioners before the Court, former Supreme Court clerks, current members and alumni of the Solicitor General’s Office, and law faculty are all among the Supreme Court experts who generously volunteer their time to serve as “Justices” at the moot courts. The common goal of all is to improve the quality of oral advocacy before the Court. All moots are confidential and closed to the public. However, upon receiving permission from counsel and after conflicts of interest have been cleared, 15-18 law students are invited to observe the moot courts.